

## **Smart phones, Shoes, Stickers and Hairstyle**

### **Determining Status Role of School Children**

#### **Abstract**

Many hidden things happen in the midst of school pupils and they determine the social ties and interpersonal relations. Adults like the parents and teachers are not aware of these small secrets! So, many times this ignorance can cause deterioration in the conditions of the social condition of their children or their pupils. This article discusses this phenomenon, its symptoms and suggests new approaches for the adults.

#### **Introduction**

The only time the parents are exposed to the dynamics that happens between their children and their classmates, is when they start nagging that they want money to buy some new item. When they are asked to explain the reason behind this determination, the children give one reason only: "because all the other children in my classroom have it and I don't want to be different, I need to have it too. Please get it for me". The children don't care or worry where or how their parents get the money, all they care about is that their critical, extremely important, requests are implemented.

After watching school children for many years, in class, in the school playground, and other palaces, a number of items were noticed to appear in the possession of the school children, yet what characterized these items is how quickly they would appear and quickly fade away. Three items surprisingly determined the kind of the interaction and dictated the dynamics between the school children: these items were smart phones, shoes and haircut.

## Marketing for kids

Everyday a new smart phone is sent to the market and the advertisements of its new capacities is filling the world, <sup>1</sup>it is everywhere: on the walls, on the buses and cars, on TV or computer. Marketing people spend a lot of money in order to know what is the last trend among school children; they even hire and implant some children to do a well paid job to locate what are the items that the children are interested in these day; their job is to pinpoint for the marketers which part of clothes is popular, which celebrity is attracting them these days. In fact they are the "spies" for the marketers; their job is to listen to the conversations between the children and watch their behavior and out appearance and report it to the marketers.

After collecting all this information marketers publish advertisements of new items that answer all the information collected earlier by the "spy". These advertisements are very powerful because they make the person who reads or watches them have the feeling that he/she will never have happiness in life unless he/she gets this item, no matter how much it costs or how dangerous it might be. Marketers work on the feelings of the school children, they touch what is very sensitive for them such as friendship and popularity. They would give the school children the fantasy of becoming accepted among all the other pupils with NO exception. They feed these fantasies by promising them immediate results. They show children with happy faces, in the park when the weather is spring and nice, big smiles made the item sell even if it is worthless or even worse, it is harmful<sup>2</sup>. Due to their pedagogical, psychological development level, they are vulnerable and can easily

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1 in fact statistics say that every 20 seconds people see a kind of advertisement.

<sup>2</sup> Like the latest entertainment invention for children to release their stress which is called "spinner". Many accidents occurred to the hands or fingers of the children, the number of accidents increases daily as the latest reports of the doctors in Soroka Hospital, south Israel confirmed. That's besides the psychological negative effect.

be affected by ads. Their mental development has not been completed yet, their decisions are impulsive and irrational.

Calvert, S. L. claims <sup>3</sup> that nowadays, children have become the target of the sales promoters for two main reasons: first, the children started to have their own income which obtains them the right to spend it as they wish; second, is that the media in this era of modern technology is dedicating a big space to promote children's products. Calvert explains that newer marketing approaches have led to online advertising and to so-called stealth marketing techniques, such as embedding products in the program content in films, online, and in video games.

Caroline Oates and her friends<sup>4</sup> studied the reaction of the children to advertisements and checked whether their mental capacity allows them to understand the advertisement fully or not. They found out that children do remember television advertisements, but their purpose is not fully understood.

"Opportunities to advertise to children expanded with the explosive growth of the Internet, and thousands of child-oriented Web sites with advertising content have appeared in the past few years", says Brian Wilcox and his colleagues <sup>5</sup> in their report. Children are targeted because their cognitive development is not completed hence can be easily misled by the advertisements.

Wilcox and his colleagues studied two main stages in the cognitive development of the children; they say: "Two important information processing tasks are required for any person to achieve a mature understanding of advertising messages. First, the individual must be able to distinguish between commercial and noncommercial content. In other words, an individual must be able to differentiate the ads from the programs. Studies of children indicate that those below the

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<sup>3</sup> Calvert, S. L. "Children as Consumers: Advertising and Marketing." *The Future of Children*, vol. 18 no. 1, 2008, pp. 205-234.

<sup>4</sup> Oates, C., Blades, M. and Gunter, B. (2002), Children and television advertising: when do they understand persuasive intent?. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 1: 238-245.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Wilcox, Dale Duckel, and others, Report of the APA Task Force on Advertising and Children, American Psychological Association, February, 2004.

ages of 4–5 years do not consistently distinguish program from commercial content, even when program/commercial separation devices are used. As children reach the age of 4–5 years, they typically perceive a categorical distinction between commercials and programming, but primarily on the basis of affective or perceptual cues only. The second essential cognitive task involved in a mature comprehension of advertising is the ability to recognize the persuasive intent of advertising and to apply that knowledge in the children's understanding of the advertising message. In other words, mature persuasive intent comprehension involves not only the recognition that the advertiser has a perspective different from the viewer and that advertisers intend to persuade their audience to want to buy their products, but also that such persuasive communication is biased, and that biased messages must be interpreted differently than unbiased messages<sup>6</sup>

### **Item number 1: Smart Phones**

Nina Angeli Pilapil<sup>7</sup> started by mentioning the few advantages of using the smart phones among children, then she mentions four disadvantages of using smart phones; she says that it is important for the parents to be aware of these disadvantages on their children, because they have physical and social negative effect on them.

Socially: smart phones detach kids from the true essence of social interaction as well as smart phone games and applications designed for kids can actually discourage them from interacting with other kids and people around them.

Physically, smart phones can weaken children's eye sight and excessive exposure to the use of smart phones at an early age can

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p, 5.

Nina Angeli Pilapil, § Dangers Posed by Smart phones on kids, May, 2012, The Center For New Discoveries In Learning, Inc. <http://www.howtolearn.com/2012/05/4-dangers-posed-by-smartphones-on-kids/>

trigger poor eye sight for kids. Their eyes would constantly have to adjust to the phone screen which can also be a cause for headaches and even migraines at a very young age; in other words smart phones can affect brain development.

Cognitively, the use of smart phones exposes children to the practice of clicking or jumping from one option to another that trains them to gather small chunks of information. This habit may be harmful to kids' overall brain development. They will be trained to switch from one topic to another quickly and it will be hard for them to focus and concentrate on just one big chunk of information when the situation calls for it.

Smart phones can be harmful both physically and socially at the same time: they can have detrimental effects on children's body development and decrease their social interaction. Online and video games are terribly addicting, so it is highly likely that kids will spend hours playing on smart phones if they get hooked on a particular game. Thus, they might be discouraged from getting up from their seat and going out to play with their friends. Due to the lack of sports and exercises, children can get overweight or develop other body ailments that may arise from inadequate physical activities.

Financially speaking, smart phones are very costly, and it takes the children a lot of persuasion attempts to convince their parents to give out such big amount of money to buy a new smart phone or to upgrade their phone. "What is so urgent and what is the difference between the old phone and the new phone that you request? " this is the typical question that the parents ask their children and the last have a million say to prove the importance of the upgrading of the phone. But the parents have no idea what is standing behind this nagging and insisting to do so! The answers that the parents would hear might be: "it looks cool and all the children my age have it and I need to have it too." They can number the features using a language that you will never understand. And they keep saying exactly what the advertisers showed in the ads: "purchasing this item

would make me feel happy, don't you wish to see me happy mom/dad?" Children wish to spend a lot of time in front of the screens of all kinds, mobile phones, TV, computer, iPod, tablet...etc. they know how to manage them well without the assistance of an adult, in fact using the smart phones increases their feeling of independence, capacity and a good feeling of achievement.

It has become normal in many schools to bring smart phones to class, so it has become a sign of status in class; the more expensive and advanced your phone is, the higher is your status and popularity. If you want to belong to a specific group in class, then you have to follow up and get the last smart phone trend.

### **Item number 2: Shoes**

There is a big connection between wearing shoes and self esteem among school children, the decision to wear certain footwear reflects the personality of the school child and the peer pressure activated upon him/her. Girls and boys have different preferences and motives in choosing shoes: while the girls can fluctuate between using ballet shoes or high heel shoes, boys can fluctuate between different international sport footwear brands.

Russell W. Belk <sup>8</sup> claims that special category of transformative shoe is the athletic shoe. Advertisers spend over \$200 million dollar per year in U.S. advertising such shoes; the inevitable result is that people come to believe that their athletic performance is greatly affected by the shoe they wear. Athletes also recognize the psychological advantage that having the latest footwear may give them over competitors, and this is reflected in accepting to make advertisements to market the footwear that they tried.

These ads are enormously affecting school children and drive them to believe that wearing the same brand name will make them

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<sup>8</sup> Russell W. Belk. Shoes and Self, Association For Consumer Research, 30, 2003, pp 27-30.

advanced athletes comparing with their class mates. Yet not all the famous athletes advertise shoes because they are good quality, in fact it is estimated that most of the athletic shoes sold are worn for fashion are not used for their avowed purposes. Perhaps because the advertising for these shoes stresses the performance benefits they provide, it is such benefits that are cited by many athletes as the reason for their preferences in athletic shoes; in other words, the school children are ready to obey the instructions of their famous favorite athlete that advises them to purchase certain footwear.

Shoes are considered a prestige symptom especially with the spread of football games in the media from all over the world. Today people in Israel can follow the news of the teams in Spain or Uganda, know the names of the team members, the team captain, follow the latest news of the team and follow up their next game live on the TV or internet. Young school children look up at these famous football players, they are their models and example for success, fame and wealth; hence they try to imitate them in everything possible, starting with wearing their outfits, to putting on the shoes that have the trade mark of their team. The marketing people are aware of the attraction of children for these super players, so they fill the market with items that have their pictures. While watching the football games, the children pay a special attention to the shoes of the players. Now the advertisers, when making the ads for the shoes that have their pictures of league symbol, make sure that the advertisement makes the children believe that if they put on these specific shoes, then they will become strong, fast and clever; probably one day famous and wealthy exactly like their favorite football player that they look up to. Definitely, the price of such an item is extremely high- without any guarantee for the quality.

School children that show up putting on items that have the symbols or pictures of the famous football players, will automatically become popular, they will be surrounded with school children who come to look, touch or even try on these items. This reaction will give the school child that came having them, a good feeling of being

accepted or wanted in the group. This typical reaction is also implemented on other items such as school supplies: pencils, pens, erasers, notebook, diaries, book rappers, pencil cases and the most expensive item- school bag. The prices of such items are imaginary and are considered a huge burden for the parents.

### **Item number 3: Stickers**

Stickers were first used as a method to improve behavior at school and as reinforcement for school children to keep up the high effort to achieve good academic results. Pol A. C. van Lier<sup>9</sup> mentioned using stickers as a method of intervention that teachers can use to help school children that have behavioral problems. He says:" The intervention had a positive impact on the development of all disruptive behavior problems in children with intermediate levels of these problems at baseline. Effect sizes of mean difference at outcome were medium or small. In children with the highest levels of disruptive behavior at baseline, a positive impact of the intervention was found for conduct problems.

Unlike such positive use of stickers, there are popular products among the school children that have no practical target or use, yet the school children like to purchase them simply because they have the picture of their favorite team on them; products such as stickers of all sizes and shapes, some are 3D and others have glitter. Bringing these stickers to the class can make the school child the king of the class at that day. Distributes these expensive stickers to the friends, gives the school child a sense of power because he/she are the only ones that can decide to whom these stickers go. Other kids will start to beg him/her for one sticker, they would remind him/her of old favors they made for him/her and ask for pay back or remind him/her with of the previous time when the roles were the opposite

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<sup>9</sup> Pol A. C. van Lier and others, Preventing Disruptive Behavior in Elementary Schoolchildren: Impact of a Universal Classroom-Based Intervention, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 2004, Vol. 72, No. 3, 467–478.

and he/she received the stickers from them. The dynamics between the school children keeps fluctuating according to their mood and according the current circumstances. One moment the person who got the stickers becomes popular and everyone wants to be friends with him/her; then suddenly they lose their popularity and another one receives it, and they become the followers. School children are ready to give up anything for such a moment of glory. They are ready to drive their parents crazy, nagging so that they would buy for them these stickers. Stickers themselves are nothing- one moment they look nice the next moment they are in the trash; yet they are the source of power for the child that brings them to class<sup>10</sup>. It gives him/her the opportunity to make new friends or confirm sincere present friendship. It is the powerful wand in the hand of the child<sup>11</sup>.

There are items that are considered status items for girls only and other items that are considered status items for boys only. There are characters that resemble male power such as superman, spider man, power rangers, the turtles... and others resemble female power and character such as the princess, Barbie etc... these characters deliver a message about how a boy or a girl is expected to behave. The boy must be strong, violent and powerful; while the girl must be gentle, powerless, soft and beautiful. Boys like to purchase clothes, shoes, toys and stickers that have the picture of their superheroes and the girls like to buy clothes, shoes, toys and stickers that have the picture of their favorite female character.

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<sup>10</sup> Stickers were considered a very valuable reinforcement that the teachers give to the pupils who behave well or achieve good results; they used to be very valuable in the eyes of the pupils because it is an honor to go home with a sticker on your forehead or in your notebook. But in this luxurious modern world things have changed and the symbol of these stickers have changed as well.

<sup>11</sup> This powerful wand would lose its power when the teacher request equal distribution of the stickers for all the classmates. On the other hand, that's the moment when the school child has the chance to play the role of the teacher who distributes with his/her own hands these stickers.

#### **Item number 4: Hairstyle**

In some of the school constitutions such as Thailand <sup>12</sup>, school determines the kind of hair style allowed at school. Some people say that it is acceptable and teaches discipline; and others claim that such regulation is against the children's human rights, everyone has the right to choose his/her own hairstyle that reflects their character.

once, hairstyle was a clear gender sign, it was clear who has long hair and who has short hair; but today things are different: many males like to have long hair and many girls prefer a short haircut.

Hairstyle can be a reason for bullying a school child, or a sign for belonging to a certain class group. Children can be mean and reject someone that doesn't have the same hairstyle. Or have a condition to allow a child join their group if he/she dares to have the same hairstyle. Children with a different type of hair or a different color of hair, might have difficult time being accepted.

Usually, the group leader determines the accepted hairstyle. When she makes braids, the next day all the other girls must imitate her. When she decides to have a long/short hair, the other girls must follow. The same dynamics occur among the males groups as well. Using accessories such as wax, coloring, shaving like one famous celebrity, are extremely important for the belonging to the group, otherwise you will be bullied. So, even if the parents do not know about these dynamics that determine the interrelationship

#### **Items that determine the school child status in class:**

All of the above products can be more powerful than capacity of academic achievements or praises given to the school child by his/her teacher. They can cause distraction from learning but they are powerful more than having A+ in math!

Teachers and parents should be aware of the power of these small products that can grasp the attention of the school child and distract

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<sup>12</sup><https://asiancorrespondent.com/2013/01/thailand-whats-hair-got-to-do-with-childrens-rights/#qH43eJePcECYB7ro.97>

him/her from doing the daily tasks in class, that's besides their power to determine the dynamics between them. Parents must have deep, daily conversations about what is going on for their child besides the learning material; parents should be exposed to the dynamics between their child and his/her class mates. This undertaking must not be for the sake of interfering and detecting for the child how to behave, but in order to be acknowledged of the dynamics that can have a great impact on his/her reactions and psychological condition. Social interaction between the school children has a big influence in forming their character. The awareness of the parents and the teachers and listening to them always, can be helpful. It doesn't mean that adults should interfere, not at all, because the way adults think is different from the way children think. The meaningless things in the eyes of the adults can mean a great deal in the children's eyes and visa versa.

All of this effects the status of the pupils in class: the more he/she posses things that are considered a label of status, then the more popular you are in class and others want to be with you or accept you in their group. When a pupil doesn't posse these items, then it would most likely mean that he/she will be isolated or abandoned by the other class mates.

Two parties of school pupils reaction can be observed:

- 1) The reaction of the peer group towards the school child purchased the status item: they would show affection and admiration. They would start to give him the power to decide who would and who wouldn't play with them, they would let him/her decide what to do and to set the rules of their games. They would give respect.
- 2) The reaction of the peer group towards the school child that showed them he/she could not purchase the status item: usually they do not listen to what he/she has to say, they do not allow him to participate in taking the decisions, he/she would just play the role of the follower who fulfils orders and obeys what the

leader of the group or the dominant members of the group decide or say.

Two individual reactions can be observed:

- 1) The reaction of the school pupil that was not able to purchase what is considered a status item: they might try to gain their popularity using other methods. On one hand they might decide to start to study hard in order to impress the other pupils with their academic achievements. These achievements will eventually make the teacher praise the pupil in front of the whole class, hence the group would want him/her back in their group. This would return the self confidence and sense of pride which will attract the members of the group and make them change their mind concerning ignoring him/her because of not having the status item. On the other hand, the pupil might choose another dramatic method to regain his/her popularity which is to become a "trouble maker" in class, becoming the one that annoys the others all the time and the teacher would give him/her punishment- unknowing what urged the pupil to act in this way. The inner anger that the pupil has might cause verbal or physical reaction. The fact that he/she was popular one day and the next day out of the group can cause a lot of harm to the pupil; it takes deep thinking of the problem and seeking a way out of it. This can demand a lot of time and thinking, leaving no time or energy for studying.

The third way of dealing with the current situation can be accepting the new reality of being out of the popular group, and choose to go and try to join the less popular group of pupils. In the second group he/she has more chance to be accepted, wanted or even become the leader of the group.

The reaction of this pupil towards his/her family would take the shape of negative reaction, violence or lack of cooperation because in his/her eyes they are the reason he/she are in this situation; they are to be blamed for becoming unpopular or being kicked out of the group, since they could not or didn't want to

provide for him/her the status item. They would have deep feelings of anger towards their family, accusing them of causing all the troubles that happened in their social life in class.

- 2) The reaction of the school pupil that were able to purchase what is considered a status item:

finally, the reactions of the peer group gives the individual a good feeling, but this is only temporary until another pupils brings a new attractive item, then the popularity of the fist pupils fades and the second pupil glows. This causes the first one to compete with the one that stole his popularity. This can also cause the first one to start over and go look for a new item in order to gain back his status in the group. This child of action is addicting and costs the parents a lot of money. Frustration and depression of the first one can be really deep and might cause regression in the actions of the school pupil which can take the shape of using violence or in neglecting studying because of being over occupied in this matter.